



Shaping the Future:

An Overview of the Needs Assessment Process in
Connecticut's Child Care Licensing Program

The State of Connecticut has partnered with the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA) to analyze, modernize, and strengthen the Department of Public Health's (DPH) child care licensing program. This multi-year project began with a Needs Assessment, a comprehensive evaluation of the three essential components of a licensing oversight agency: communications, regulations, and training. This proactive approach allows Connecticut to be aware of potential issues in its licensing program and to take the initiative in improving the processes necessary to continue keeping children safe.

How was the Assessment Completed?

- *Distribution and Tabulation of an Online Survey.* A 57-question, confidential survey was distributed to operators or staff of licensed child day care centers/group day care homes, providers or staff of licensed family day care homes, consultants who currently provide services to licensed child care providers, parents or guardians of a child receiving child care services from a licensed child care provider, and child day care licensing staff persons via an online survey tool. Five hundred and twenty-eight stakeholders responded to the survey.
- *Onsite Forums.* Onsite forums were held with child care providers to engage in an open discussion about how to strengthen Connecticut's child care licensing program and areas in which the family day care home regulations could be strengthened. A total of 102 providers participated in the sessions.
- *Qualitative Interviews with Survey Participants.* Survey participants who indicated that they would be willing to participate in follow-up interviews were contacted by telephone or email and asked a series of targeted questions based on information obtained through the online survey and the onsite open forums. Sixty-one stakeholders participated in the follow-up interviews.

What did We Find?

The Assessment found both strengths and opportunities for improvement in the child care licensing program, including...

- Licensing staff are professional, respectful, and fair when inspecting child care providers.
- The current sets of child care regulations do not need to be changed to be effective.
- Low inter-rater reliability among inspectors, which means that inspectors do not interpret or apply the regulations the same way.
- The current training programs for both inspectors and child care providers are insufficient for success.
- There are limited training opportunities for child care providers to effectively do their jobs.

Recommendations for Next Steps:

To address the Assessment findings, NARA recommends that the Office of Early Childhood and the Department of Public Health:

- Develop a policy and procedure manual that specifies how inspections will be conducted and how inspection results will be reviewed and applied to the licensing process.
- Develop interpretative guides for Connecticut General Statutes Section 19a-79 and 19a-87.
- Develop training curriculum for DPH licensing staff that is compliant with Connecticut's labor and employment standards that includes standardized staff training plans.
- Train licensing staff in compliance with the developed policies and procedures and best practices in human-care licensing as specified in the NARA Licensing Curriculum.
- Create a model for identifying provider training topics using inspection results and ways to offer these training opportunities.
- Disseminate information to educate stakeholders on the improvement initiatives.
- Develop an evaluation tool for DPH to test the impact of the above actions following their implementation.

In addition to the above, NARA, the Office of Early Childhood and the Department of Public Health will also review Connecticut's current child care licensing rules and regulations to ensure that they are consistent with national standards and are structured to offer the greatest possible protections to children in care.

For Connecticut to launch this initiative is both insightful and proactive as they seek to improve the tools for providers and licensing staff while ensuring the health and safety of Connecticut's children in care. The Office of Early Childhood is to be commended for their work in merging several programs into one Early Childhood component while simultaneously working to effectively improve processes, procedures, protocols and regulations for a firm foundation on which to build.